

Against the Grain

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MC: This issue is increasingly on our radar and is part of the ongoing discussion I just mentioned regarding our selection policy. Traditionally, of course, it was easy enough to dismiss vanity press publications, but the channels for self-publication are much more varied now, making self-published works worth a second look. So-called Gold Open Access is a good example of this, as it is now necessary to distinguish legitimate scholarly works available in this fashion from mere vanity publishing. I wish I could tell you we have a hard-and-fast rule for these, but in fact we make such decisions on a case-by-case basis.

ATG: *ACRL/CHOICE launched a Webinar program in spring of 2013. How does that tie in to your mission as a source for reviews? Or are we seeing an expansion of your mission?*

MC: The more we reflect on the role of **Choice** in academic libraries, the more broadly do we conceive our mission. In the most general sense, **Choice** is about *connecting*: connecting librarians with information resources, connecting scholars and students with the information they need to evaluate sources, connecting librarians with scholars and publishers, and so forth. So we see Webinars as very much a continuation of our core mission, albeit in a new form. Our Webinar program enables librarians to hear publishers give their perspectives on issues of interest and to communicate with them directly in a public forum. So *expansion*, yes, but again, consistent with our past.

ATG: *Choice Reviews Online has been totally redesigned with a new interface. What issues were you trying to resolve with the new design? Based on customer response how successful have you been? What issues remain, if any?*

MC: Our overall goal in redesigning *CRO* was to provide enhanced functionality for our users. For instance, we wanted users to be able to create multiple profiles, or “alerts,” to notify them of the publication of monographs in specific subject areas. The ability to provide **COUNTER**-compliant usage reports was another requirement of the new platform. And certainly, we hoped to be able to use the platform to create derivative products easily and quickly.

It would have been too much to hope that the rollout of the new platform would be problem-free, and frankly, we have had our share of customer issues, but a majority of these were associated with the migration from the old platform — specifically around account creation — where we failed to anticipate the scope of the task and fell behind for awhile from a customer-service perspective. And then there were the inevitable problems helping users navigate the new site. Most of these are behind us now, but we had a lot of learning to do about how to communicate with our subscribers in order to get to this point.

against the grain publisher profile

Choice

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Websites: <http://Choice360.org> and <http://www.ala.org/acrl/choice/home>

PARENT COMPANY: Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association.

OFFICERS: Mary Ellen Davis, Executive Director, **ACRL**.

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: *Choice Magazine*, *Choice Reviews Online*, *Resources for College Libraries*.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Academic librarians.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 24


NUMBER OF JOURNALS PUBLISHED ANNUALLY: 2 journals (*Choice*, *Choice Reviews Online*), published monthly.

NUMBER OF DATABASES: 1 (*Resources for College Libraries*).

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COMPANY/PUBLISHING PROGRAM:

Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries is the premier source for reviews of new English-language books and digital resources for academic libraries. Published monthly, *Choice* reviews over 600 monographs and reference titles in each issue — some 7,000 titles annually — covering more than 50 subdisciplines in the humanities, science and technology, and the social and behavioral sciences. Librarians, faculty, and key decision makers rely on *Choice* for collection development and scholarly research.

Choice is a publication of the **Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)**, a division of the **American Library Association (ALA)**. Founded in 1940, the **ACRL** is a professional association of academic librarians and other interested individuals dedicated to enhancing the ability of academic library and information professionals to serve the information needs of the higher education community.

Choice has been in continuous publication since March 1964 and is now available in three formats: as a physical magazine, on cards, and in database form as *Choice Reviews Online*. 

Remaining issues? Well, users continue to find the alert-creation process cumbersome, and many people want *CRO* to support sorting by LC subject classifiers (as in the older version), and we are working with our partners at **HighWire** to resolve these issues.

ATG: *One of your key responsibilities is to maintain Choice's competitive position in the higher education marketplace and ensure ongoing fiscal sustainability. What are you doing to make that happen? Do you have a particular strategy? Can you elaborate?*

MC: I was very fortunate to inherit from **Irv** a business that was already taking important steps toward ensuring its fiscal sustainability. We have, in addition to subscription and advertising revenue from our core product, a robust revenue stream from content licensing and from *Resources for College Libraries*, which we copublish with **ProQuest**. In terms of strategy, we are certainly looking to augment revenue from these sources, but in addition, we see the need to move beyond the “one size fits all” approach to the market we have taken in the past and to create products and services that address the specific needs of market segments. As I’ve mentioned previously, we’ve spent a

good deal of time in recent months listening to our subscribers, and our hope is that from these conversations we will be able to learn how their needs have changed and how we can best respond to them. It’s still early days, but certainly a willingness to consider providing products and services that go beyond reviews is implicit in this exercise.

ATG: *Over the last year, CHOICE has conducted a number of focus groups including those at the Charleston Conference and at ALA. What were the big takeaways from these sessions? What new initiatives can we expect from what you've learned?*

MC: Oh, I could spend a long time on this one! You will not be surprised to learn that we were the beneficiaries of an incredibly rich response from our participants, and while it’s not practical to list all of the themes we developed in these sessions, what I think I can do is characterize their concerns at the most general level. First of all, and as I mentioned a moment ago, our participants acknowledged that with the many different ways to build collections now available to libraries, reviews no longer have pride of place. This has obvious

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